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AUTHOR Macedo, Stephen
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ABSTRACT

This book contends that diversity is often to be highly valued, but not always. It should be remembered that many forms of social and religious diversity are at odds with basic commitments to liberty, equality, and civic ideals. The book argues that liberalism has an important but neglected civic dimension, and liberal democrats must take care to promote not only well ordered institutions but also well ordered citizens. This responsibility is incompatible with a neutral or hands-off stance toward diversity in general and toward the education of children in particular. Extending the ideas of John Rawls, the book defends a "civic liberalism" that supports the legitimacy of reasonable efforts to inculcate shared political virtues while leaving many larger questions of meaning and value to private communities. The book's liberal agenda for civic education offers a fundamental challenge to free-market libertarians, the religious right, parental rights activists, postmodernists, and many of those who call themselves multiculturalists. The book contains an introduction, 11 chapters, and a conclusion and is divided into three parts: (1) "Public Schooling and American Citizenship"; (2) "Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism"; and (3) "School Reform and Civic Education." (Contains notes for each chapter.) (BT)